

Benefits to Living & Working in Rural Communities

Powered by the National Rural Recruitment and Retention Network

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About 3RNET

3RNET is the most trusted resource for health professionals seeking careers in rural and underserved communities.

3RNET Mission

3RNET works to improve rural and underserved communities' access to quality health care through recruitment of physicians and other health care professionals, development of community based recruitment and retention activities, and national advocacy relative to rural and underserved health care workforce issues.

3RNET Vision

3RNET is the national leader for community-based health professional recruitment and retention, using interactive technologies and communication.

3RNET.org

Health professionals have trusted 3RNET.org to find jobs across the United States since 1995.

Rural and underserved health care employers' trusted, national platform for promoting their job openings.

3RNET's Network Coordinators

3RNET is powered by the National Rural Recruitment and Retention Network.

3RNET Network Coordinators can guide health professionals through their job search process.

Network Coordinators support employers in rural and underserved communities with hiring and keeping mission-focused health professionals.



About this Guide

This guide is a basic overview of the benefits to working in a health care profession in a rural community.

Trusted, Reliable Information

3RNET and our national network of Coordinators, the National Rural Recruitment and Retention Network, are committed to providing unbiased, reliable information for health professionals.

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This guide was created in a collaborative effort to combine the expertise and industry knowledge of 3RNET's Network Coordinators.

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Health Care Access in Rural America

Rural America has a definite need for physicians and other healthcare providers. According to the National Rural Health Association, the patient-to-primary care physician ratio in rural areas is only 39.8 physicians per 100,000 people, compared to 53.3 physicians per 100,000 in urban areas. Similarly, there are 30 generalist dentists per 100,000 residents in urban areas versus 22 per 100,000 in rural areas.

According to the WWAMI Rural Health Research Center 2019 report on the Supply and Demand of the Primary Care Workforce in Rural America, there are 69.5 nurse practitioners in metro areas per 100,000 people, compared with 60.8 in non-metro areas. And 42.5 physician assistants in metro areas compared to 29.0 in non-metro areas.

This uneven distribution of providers has an impact on the health of the population. Additionally, the HRSA 2024 State of the Primary Care Workforce report projects a shortage of 87,150 full-time equivalent (FTE) primary care physicians by 2037, which will be particularly acute in nonmetro areas.

Rural living is becoming increasingly popular, and for a variety of reasons. For many, having a less crowded place to live and work is attractive. Others enjoy the sense of community and family-friendly atmosphere. These, along with many other benefits, make practicing—and living—in a rural area of the U.S. a great choice, both personally and professionally.

Continue reading to learn why other physicians and health care professionals choose to work in rural America.



Benefits of Living & Working Rural

Getting Back to Your Roots

Many health care professionals have rural roots, and enjoy going back to them, whether it's to their own hometown, or another rural community. Many also value the rural environment for raising children.

According to one physician, "I had the best childhood, with plenty of land to run on, muddy ditches to swim in, and cows and other livestock to chase. We want the same for our children."

Many want to give back to the community they grew up in. Says one physician, "I went to medical school for the single purpose of coming back to my hometown and opening up a clinic."

Community Impact & the Need for Accessible Health Care

Another factor contributing to many health care professionals' decisions to work in a rural area is simply the need these places have for accessible health care. Rural hospitals need physicians and other healthcare professionals to remain viable, and more and more physicians appreciate being able to support those community hospitals. And with the increasing use of telehealth, healthcare professionals in rural areas can provide care to patients remotely, expanding their reach and impact.

Healthcare professionals in rural areas have the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the health and well-being of their communities. They can build strong relationships with patients and become integral parts of the community, leading to a deeper sense of connection and fulfillment.

Professional Development

Working in rural communities with limited access to care often provides a wide range of clinical experience and develop skills in areas such as primary care, emergency medicine, and public health. Exposure to a wider variety of medical conditions, including some that may be less common in urban areas, can expand their clinical knowledge.

Healthcare professionals in rural areas often have broader responsibilities, which can enhance their skills and experience. They may have more autonomy in making decisions and handling complex cases due to fewer specialists and resources. This can be empowering and help build confidence in one's abilities. They may also take on leadership roles that they might not have access to in larger, urban settings. Healthcare professionals in rural settings can often progress quickly in their careers due to the need for a broad skill set and the leadership opportunities that arise in smaller facilities.

Supportive Networks

Many rural healthcare facilities offer supportive networks and resources to help professionals adapt to their new environment and provide the best possible care. In rural areas, healthcare professionals may find greater community support and tighter-knit work environments, which can offer a sense of camaraderie and mentorship. Rural healthcare professionals often work in smaller teams, fostering close collaboration with colleagues in other disciplines, which can lead to enhanced learning and professional growth.

Working in communities with limited access to care allows healthcare professionals to develop broad awareness, adaptability, and sensitivity, which are valuable skills in any healthcare environment. Making a difference in rural communities can be a source of pride and can enhance a healthcare professional's reputation within the broader medical community.

Lifestyle Improvements & Debt Reduction

With physicians coming out of training with such high debt loads, rural communities may offer significant advantages in being able to provide very nice lifestyles and help reduce debt at the same time. Smaller communities may make incoming physicians eligible for more federal and/or state loan repayment programs; many communities offer their own scholarship, loan forgiveness and loan repayment programs as recruitment incentives.

In addition to the lifestyle benefits of living and practicing in rural areas, the cost of living is generally significantly less than urban and metro areas. This can lead to a better work-life balance and a higher quality of life for healthcare professionals, where they can more easily save money and afford housing.

A Shorter Commute

A shorter commute is just one benefit of rural living. But to many, this offers the opportunity to spend more time with family or to do things you love. Says one physician, “One of the things I really like about practicing in a small town is more time for my family... Time in traffic is time away from them.”

Says another, “The clinic here is 10 minutes away from my home, and my home is a couple of blocks from the hospital. Often, I’ll run home for lunch to spend time with my wife and the kids. It’s nice to be home right after clinic is done, to have dinner with the family, and to spend time with my kids before they go to bed. In a rural town, anywhere I am I’m close to home.”

Said another, “If I want to finish a cup of coffee on the way into the office in the morning, I have to drive around in circles—or I can walk the commute in 5 minutes.”

Recreation

Rural America offers access to a variety of outdoor activities, a more relaxed environment, and opportunities to engage in local events and hobbies. Working in rural areas can significantly enhance one’s recreational experiences and overall quality of life.

Rural areas offer more space, peaceful environments, and access to nature with less urban noise and air pollution contributing to a more balanced and healthier lifestyle. There are abundant opportunities for community involvement from local events and festivals, gardening and farming, volunteer programs, to local sports teams and clubs.

Says one doctor, “The secret thing about rural communities is that there is way more to do than we have time for—you just have to find it.”

Work-Life Balance

Many rural healthcare workers enjoy the work-life balance rural living provides. Smaller communities often mean less administrative burden, less traffic, and fewer cases of burnout due to a less hectic work environment. Says one, “A rural medical practice enables me to balance work and family.”

Work-life balance is important for improved job satisfaction, health, and overall happiness. Working in a rural community—with fewer stressors such as traffic, shorter commutes allowing for more time at home with family, and plenty of opportunities for recreation—can help improve the work-life balance.



Summary

In summary, working in rural areas can offer healthcare professionals a mix of career advancement, personal fulfillment, financial incentives, and opportunities for a balanced and impactful life.

These benefits can make working a rural community both rewarding and fulfilling for healthcare professionals.

Why not consider rural practice? While it may not be for everyone—it may be perfect for you.

To search available rural job opportunities on 3RNET, [register here](#).





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Seeking Careers in Rural and Underserved Communities.